

Workplace Words as Everyday Labor Knowledge: Myanmar Migrant Garment Workers in a Thai Border Town

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Abstract

On the factory grounds, even a few short workplace terms can mark the difference between safety and arrest, authority and autonomy, and payment and exploitation. By focusing on workplace language use and shared terms among Myanmar migrants in Thailand's garment sector, this article explores how workers' shared terms have become daily essentials, a form of labor knowledge for surviving in the border's economic landscape. Rather than coming from formal workplace training, these words are borrowed from other languages in the migrant setting and developed through their repetitive everyday use among migrants. Migrant workers must navigate a complex regulatory framework, marked by various forms of legality, wage struggles, production demands, power hierarchies, and workplace supervision and control. In the process, they adopt certain terms that they share as common resources within their community. This article examines how migrant workers' unique vocabulary functions as practical, experiential knowledge that helps them manage authority, precariousness, and everyday governance in the migrant labor context.